

Manners Of Seeking Islamic Knowledge

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The main reason I have decided to ...[write about]... the very important topic of how to seek knowledge correctly is because I have been travelling quite extensively around the UK for a good few years now and have seen appalling examples of how not to seek it. More than that, I have been on the receiving end of most of the pitiful demonstrations of ill manners in that regard, as well as some of my close friends.

That is precisely why the scholars of Islam used to pay so much attention to teaching their students the manners of seeking the knowledge they wanted to seek before actually embarking on the journey. That is why they authored many books on the topic. As far as I know, they are not available in English. But I would encourage my brothers and sisters to learn Arabic so they would be able to swim in the vast ocean of knowledge available in Arabic and not be content with little pools of it available in English or any other language.

The scholars of Islam divided the topic of the manners of seeking knowledge into three main sub-topics: the manners of the student, the manners of the teacher and how to deal with the tools of the trade: the books. ...We are going to look at the first one: what should the student of knowledge do in order to please Allaah with his quest for knowledge and achieve his objective?

Imam Ibn Jamaa'ah, may Allaah have mercy on him, said in his excellent book on the subject the title of which translates as "A Reminder for the Listener and Speaker of the Manners of the Scholar and Student":

Chapter Three – The Manners of the Learner. Part One – His Manners In Relation to Himself:

1 – He must purify his heart from everything involving deception, evil, impurity and envy, as well wrong beliefs and manners so the heart becomes suitable to accept the knowledge and preserve it and understand its hidden meanings...And when the heart becomes ready to accept the knowledge, it grows and its barakah (blessing) becomes apparent, the same way as a good patch of earth brings forth and grows what was planted in it. As the hadeeth says:

"Indeed, there is a piece of flesh in the (human) body. If it is sound and healthy, the whole body is sound and healthy, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Indeed, it is the heart." [Bukhari and Muslim]

And Sahl (one of the scholars of the Salaf) said: "It is not permissible or possible for a heart to receive the light (of pure faith and knowledge) while it contains something that Allaah detests."

2 – The correct intention in seeking knowledge, so that he only intends by his search for knowledge seeing the Face of Allaah the Most High (in the Hereafter), as well as acting upon that knowledge, reviving the Islamic Shari'ah, enlightening his heart and improving himself, being close to Allaah when he meets Him and making himself eligible for the great favours and enormous reward prepared for the people of knowledge on the Day of Judgement. Sufyan Ath-Thawri (one of the great scholars of the Salaf) said: "I have never found it difficult to correct anything more than my intention." And he must not intend by his quest for

knowledge any worldly reward, like leadership [like some “students of leadership”, I mean, “knowledge”, do], wealth [some people do not understand the difference between only intending to gain wealth or money through one’s knowledge, which is not allowed, and charging a fee, especially when in need, for teaching it], boasting in front of one’s friends and peers [like those who go around saying: “I sat with Sheikh so and so, I am very close to Sheikh so and so...”, not benefiting much from their “sitting” and “closeness” in the way of understanding the religion and having some manners as an essential part of implementing it, like those Sheikhs do], people showing respect to him, speaking at gatherings and meetings and the like.

One of the great scholars of Islam and foremost students of Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Abu Yusuf, may Allaah have mercy on both of them, said:

“O people! Seek (to please) Allaah the Most High with your knowledge, because I have never attended a gathering in which I intended to be humble, except that I left it having been honoured, and I have never attended a gathering in which I intended to gain the upper hand except that I left it having been put to shame. Knowledge is an act of worship and a way to get close to Allaah” [meaning one cannot do that with an incorrect intention]. End of quote from the book of Ibn Jamaa’ah.

A quick comment: the fact that our Pious Predecessors paid so much attention to these two issues (purifying one’s heart and having the correct intention in seeking knowledge) shows that anyone who wants to be successful in his or her quest for knowledge must start off correctly.

We are sick and tired of some brothers and even sisters who behave as if we owe them something as soon as they make a little bit of progress in their path of seeking knowledge. They love doing khutbahs (sermons) on Friday, delivering lectures and teaching lessons, as well as telling everyone how important it is to follow the Sunnah, but when it comes to understanding that knowledge and implementing it, like helping someone or being generous to your guest [we might have to dedicate a whole issue to this topic], they are nowhere to be seen!

In their place we find many of those who do not shout at street corners about the Sunnah coming and helping their brothers and sisters. It is a very serious and infectious disease and it must be treated as such: not tolerated, just like the Salaf used to do.

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